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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/10/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: DFM ARAZ AZIMOV DOWNBEAT ON TRACK II MISSION TO  
NK, ARMENIA, AND AZERBAIJAN

REF: A. BAKU 00837

[1](#)B. BAKU 00836

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Lu for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) In a July 5 meeting with Charge, Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov suggested that the recent Track II mission by Armenian Ambassador to Russia Armen Smbatian and Azerbaijani Ambassador to Russia Polad Bulbuloglu had limited GOAJ support. (NOTE: Per Refs A and B, Smbatian and Bulbuloglu led a group of Armenian and Azerbaijani intellectuals to Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia, and Azerbaijan on June 28-29. The group met with the unofficial NK President Arkadi Ghukasian, Armenian President Kocharian, and Azerbaijani President Aliyev. END NOTE.)

[1](#)2. (C) Azimov argued that the trip occurred largely at Smbatian and Bulbuloglu's personal initiative. Azimov explained that Smbatian and Bulbuloglu were both former culture ministers and had good personal contacts in Russia. For example, Azimov commented that Smbatian and Bulbuloglu had been instrumental in calming unspecified "clashes" in Russia. Azimov also noted that Bulbuloglu's idea of traveling to Nagorno-Karabakh -- particularly to see his father's home in Shusha -- was not new; Bulbuloglu floated the idea two years ago, asking the MFA if he could travel to his family's hometown. Azimov specified that the idea for the trip was not a Russian, Presidential, or OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair initiative.

[1](#)3. (C) Azimov sought to minimize GOAJ sanction of the track II mission. Azimov said the MFA had no involvement with the visit, "until the last minute." President Aliyev was not in full support of this initiative either, according to Azimov. While President Aliyev did not disallow Smbatian and Bulbuloglu's trip, he was not fully supportive of the visit either, said Azimov.

[1](#)4. (C) Throwing cold water on the near-term prospects for future track II visits, Azimov said the recent trip was a "specific one-time action by two Ambassadors." Azimov was more broadly downbeat on the OSCE Minsk Group process, noting that "the process may die." Azimov observed that the French and RussianCo-Chairs were largely disinterested in the process. Azimov then argued that one of the problems for the process is that Karabakhi Armenians control the Armenian position in negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. (NOTE: Azimov was referring to the fact that Kocharian and Armenian Defense Minister Serge Sarkisian are Karabakhi Armenians. END NOTE)

15. (SBU) COMMENT: Whether Azimov's account is true or not, the GOAJ publicly has sought to put some distance between itself and Smbatian and Bulbuloglu's trip. It is possible, however, that the GOAJ allowed this trip primarily as a test balloon to gauge the Azerbaijani public reaction. Because President Aliyev's legitimacy is intimately connected to the GOAJ position on NK and because President Aliyev and the GOAJ generally prefer cautious policy options that aim to minimize risks, it is not surprising -- albeit unfortunate -- that the GOAJ has not adopted a more positive public and private stance on the Track II mission.

LU